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QUESTION OF THE REALIZATION IN ALL COUNTRIES OF THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS CONTAINED IN THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND IN THE INTERNATIONAL COVENANT ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS, AND STUDY OF SPECIAL PROBLEMS WHICH THE DEVELOPING COUNTRIES FACE IN THEIR EFFORTS TO ACHIEVE THESE HUMAN RIGHTS, INCLUDING: PROBLEMS RELATED TO THE RIGHT TO ENJOY AN ADEQUATE STANDARD OF LIVING; FOREIGN DEBT, ECONOMIC ADJUSTMENT POLICIES AND THEIR EFFECTS ON THE FULL ENJOYMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND, IN PARTICULAR, ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECLARATION ON THE RIGHT TO DEVELOPMENT

Report of the seminar on extreme poverty and the denial of human rights

Note by the Secretariat

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Introduction

1. In pursuance of Commission on Human Rights resolution 1994/12 and Economic and Social Council decision 1994/243, the Centre for Human Rights and the Special Rapporteur on human rights and extreme poverty of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, Mr. Leandro Despouy, organized a seminar on extreme poverty and the denial of human rights. The seminar was held at United Nations Headquarters from 12 to 14 October 1994.

2. The preliminary report (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1993/16) and the interim report (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1994/19) of the Special Rapporteur on human rights and extreme poverty were made available to the participants of the seminar to serve as background documents. In his interim report the Special Rapporteur specified that the aim of the seminar would be "to give special attention to the living conditions of individuals and families living in extreme poverty (para. 13) and to "permit a direct dialogue between families living in extreme poverty and the representatives of organizations working with them and the Special Rapporteur, other human rights experts, specialists in effort to combat extreme poverty and representatives of international organizations" (para. 15). The Special Rapporteur hoped to transmit a document on the results of the seminar to the Commission at its fifty-first session and to the World Summit for Social Development to be held in Copenhagen in March 1995. In its resolution 1994/41, the Sub-Commission considered that it would be useful for the Special Rapporteur to do so.

3. Some 40 participants attended the seminar in their individual capacity. Among them were persons living in conditions of extreme poverty and persons accompanying them; experts on the issues of extreme poverty and human rights; and members of organizations working with the impoverished.

4. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) were represented by observers. The Governments of Bangladesh, Côte d'Ivoire, France, Germany, Japan, Morocco, Nigeria, South Africa, the United States of America and Zimbabwe were also represented by observers.

5. A list of participants is contained in annex II.

6. At the 5th and closing meeting, on 14 October 1994, His Excellency Mr. Amara Essy, President of the forty-ninth session of the United Nations General Assembly and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Côte d'Ivoire, addressed the seminar. He stated that poverty was to be found all over the world - from his own country to just outside the building where this seminar was convened. Mr. Essy underlined the importance of the field work undertaken by many participants as well as of the conclusions and recommendations of the seminar itself, which he was awaiting with keen interest and which would be important as well for the upcoming World Summit on Social Development.

7. The seminar was opened by the representative of the Centre for Human Rights, Mr. Moctar Cissé, who read a message from the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, Mr. Ibrahima Fall. In his message,

Mr. Fall recalled the steps taken at the United Nations since the Commission on Human Rights decided in 1989 to focus on extreme poverty, and he stressed the importance of the participation of persons living in extreme poverty in the seminar. (The full text of Mr. Fall's message is contained in annex I.)

8. At the request of the Special Rapporteur on human rights and extreme poverty, Mr. Cissé explained to the participants that, due to circumstances beyond his control the Special Rapporteur was unable to attend and chair the seminar. The Special Rapporteur would, however, fully take into account and include in his work the seminar's findings. On behalf of the Special Rapporteur, Mr. Cissé thanked the French Government for its generous financial support, the experts and all the participants for their presence, the Centre for Human Rights and the International Movement ATD Fourth World for its assistance.

9. The following officers were elected by acclamation:

Chairman: Mr. José Bengoa

Rapporteur: Mr. Bruno Romazzotti.

10. Following his election, the Chairman made a statement in which he asserted that extreme poverty was the main contradiction of our time and the greatest social and political problem facing the contemporary world. (See annex I for the full text.)

11. Mrs. de Vos van Steenwijk, President of the International Movement ATD Fourth World, made a statement, at the request of the Special Rapporteur, tracing the history of the seminar and how people living in extreme poverty were able to attend. (See annex I for the text.)

12. At the 1st meeting, on 12 October 1994, the seminar adopted the agenda, as follows:

1. Opening of the seminar.

2. Dimensions of the problem of poverty.

3. Extreme poverty and its effects from the point of view of human rights.

4. Structural approaches: major policy issues.

I. DIMENSIONS OF THE PROBLEM OF POVERTY

13. The dimensions of the problem of extreme poverty were discussed at the 2nd meeting, on 12 October 1994.

14. The item was introduced by Mrs. Else Øyen, Chairperson of the Comparative Research Programme on Poverty (CROP) of the International Social Science Council and professor of health and social policy studies at the University of Bergen (Norway). Mrs. Øyen emphasized that there is no single definition of poverty that captures all or even a major aspect of the phenomenon. She

analysed three major modes of thought that are in use to describe poverty: poverty described as a lack or scarcity of resources; as related to a distinct social fabric; and as a lack of opportunity structure.

15. When poverty is described as a lack or scarcity of resources, the analytical unit used is the individual, the household or the family. Their state of poverty is seen as resulting from the lack of one or a number of resources. These resources are defined as either basic necessities for survival; or as material and non-material means which can lead to a better standard of living; or as access to social goods which give the individual, household or family a better control of their own life situation. These resources vary widely and include food, education, health facilities and social background.

16. Attempts have been made to establish hierarchies of resources, designating some to be more important than others for a definition of poverty. While there seemed to be little doubt that food, clean water and protection from the elements are among those that constitute the baseline for such a hierarchy, there is little consensus on how other resources should be ranked or, when combined in indices, should be weighed against each other.

17. Within this analytical framework, extreme poverty can be defined as a total lack of these resources. Mrs. Øyen emphasized that methodological problems arise when extreme poverty is defined as a situation that includes a lack of these resources that is not total or absolute. This is due to the absence of a theoretical framework which can establish the lines separating extreme poverty and poverty from non-poverty. A vast literature on social indicators, poverty lines and levels of living standards describes these methodological problems in detail.

18. The second mode of thought referred to by Mrs. Øyen describes poverty as being related to a distinct social fabric. In this case, the focus is on the social organization of the poor. This gives rise to the question whether the way of life of the poor can be characterized by a social fabric which is either different from that of other groups in society; or lacks certain vital elements; or is inadequate or inconsistent. Implicit in this approach to the analysis of poverty, in all three cases, is a comparison with other groups, i.e. the majority, or the elite. Built into this mode of thought is a model of the dominant society and its institutions as a "superior" society which produces less poverty. In this respect, Mrs. Øyen emphasized the importance of scrutinizing the images the non-poor hold of the poor; the non-poor being the ones who define poverty and who thereby might be supporting a social structure that excludes the poor. Defining people living in extreme poverty in this way requires the identification of those features of a social fabric which produce, reproduce, reinforce or sustain poverty within a certain segment of the population. The time dimension should also be considered, both the generational aspect and the occurrence of poverty during the life cycle of an individual.

19. When poverty is described as a lack of opportunity structure, the focus is on the society at large. Society is seen here as a set of opportunity structures which allows individuals to change their station in life. These opportunity structures include the educational system, the labour market and

the availability of jobs, access to and ownership of land, the openness of social networks and access to political life. Barriers impeding access to such structures include a wide range of socio-political phenomena, such as a class- or gender-dominated social structure, a religious or military monopoly of policies, a straightforward denial of a general right to vote or to freely express one's opinions, and an informal consensus among the majority or the dominant group of society stereotyping poor people as incompetent.

20. This lack of opportunity structure can be of a general nature and affect society at large, or it can be of a more limited nature and affect only specific segments of people living in poverty. Seen in this framework one of the most striking differences between poverty in developed countries and poverty in developing countries becomes visible. Developed countries are characterized by a wide variety of opportunity structures, whereas developing countries are characterized by a shortage of opportunity structures for the majority of the population. People living in extreme poverty can, in this framework, be more easily identified in developed countries where they are relatively worse off as compared to the general population, and where they are fewer in numbers. In developing countries identification of people living in extreme poverty is difficult because poverty is a more general condition and the differences in access to opportunity structures between the people living in extreme poverty and large segments of a generally poor population are likely to be marginal.

21. This framework takes as its starting point a definition of people living in extreme poverty as people who do not have access to one or several opportunity structures or, on the other hand, opportunity structures that do not give access to the extremely poor. Once more, theoretical and methodological obstacles arise, since there is no obvious or natural choice of opportunity structure: a generally accepted model of extreme poverty that includes several opportunity structures simply does not exist.

22. In concluding her introduction, Mrs. Øyen pointed at the crude and cynical political and economic rationalities that tend to perpetuate poverty. The poor, for example, provide the non-poor society with flexible labour and are forced to buy the goods that would otherwise be wasted by the non-poor. Furthermore, the poor tend not to be politically active, which can be in the interest of the dominant, non-poor society. Lastly, Mrs. Øyen referred to the importance of a psychological element, where the mere existence of poverty can confirm the conviction of the non-poor that somehow their own behaviour is morally just, as opposed to that of the poor. Mrs. Øyen expressed regret that these pressures which help to sustain and create poverty are not faced squarely in many of the documents on poverty that are produced by the United Nations. She pointed out that to perform this task, however difficult, was vital in any effort to combat poverty.

23. In the ensuing debate, a number of participants stressed the importance of including the points of view expressed by persons living in conditions of extreme poverty themselves, when discussing the dimensions of the problem of poverty. The question of defining poverty was secondary to the question of knowledge about poverty. In this respect, many participants considered it

indispensable to build upon the knowledge possessed by those living in poverty. For this purpose a number of persons living in conditions of poverty had been invited to participate actively in the seminar.

24. People living in extreme poverty and those working with them who were present at the seminar insisted on several points which gave particular significance to their participation. They stressed that they were acting as representatives of others living in extreme poverty in their city, neighbourhood or community. They had been preparing for the seminar, along with other very poor people, for a long time. They were therefore speaking in the name of the people who had sent them as well as on their own behalf.

25. Echoing Mrs. de Vos van Steenwijk, who had insisted on the right of people to respond to information collected concerning them, a participant from North America said that it was necessary that the persons concerned participate actively in formulating the definition of extreme poverty rather than simply remaining an object of study.

26. A participant from Western Europe stated that the experience of those working alongside the poor showed that it was by no means easy to build upon the poor's experiences. In his view, the two principal obstacles to the gathering of their knowledge were, firstly, the state of dependency of the poor and secondly, their sense of being responsible for their situation or being otherwise at fault. When one tried to question the very poor, for example about their food needs, they often did not speak freely because of feelings of shame and humiliation.

27. A participant from Latin America testified to the many difficulties that people living in poverty encounter. As an example she mentioned her own experience of attempting to take a small number of impoverished children to a zoo, after having prepared them for the visit for a long time. Upon arriving at the gate of the zoo, however, the children were flatly denied entry without any explanation and apparently purely on the grounds of how they looked.

28. A participant from North America recounted how, when she found herself completely destitute, she and her children lived with 60 other people in a shelter. She said that the families who lived there were under constant scrutiny from the social services, who intervened in the families' lives and threatened to take away the children. She described how the children of one family at the shelter were taken away. She didn't know the reason, but the event had marked her deeply and made her feel that the integrity of the family should be better respected. She was only able to assume her full responsibilities as a mother when she got her own apartment, when her son was eight years old.

29. Several participants stressed that people living in extreme poverty were often excluded from social life and suffered from an isolation that was sometimes total. Such a person could be totally cut off from his or her family and social milieu. The isolation was very painful and it was said that the family was the last protection against total misery. A participant from Eastern Europe stressed this aspect. She described her work with children and young people living separated from their families because their families' conditions of poverty had destroyed its integrity.

30. Another participant explained that the exercise of any responsibilities, including family responsibilities, was rendered almost impossible by extreme poverty. When all one's energies were devoted to survival, how can one be a responsible member of the community? A participant living in a poor neighbourhood in Africa summed up the comments of several others by asking how one could be expected to act responsibly when one was "wrapped in a cloak of misery". He described how, under certain conditions, a poor man could not support his family and how, in despair, he draws away from them.

31. Several participants said that living in extreme poverty prevented them from having access to well-being and such basic rights as the right to primary education. One participant, who was working with a family who lived under a bridge along a filthy canal in a large city in Asia, described the conditions there. The misery was such that the children were obliged to work, which made it impossible for them to go to school.

32. A participant from Africa spoke of the peoples of black Africa who, according to him, had been bypassed by progress and development. Their already dramatic situation was becoming worse. He asked how one could talk of "democracy" and "human rights" when meeting basic human needs was a dream.

33. Several participants stressed the efforts being made by people living in extreme poverty to deal with the situation in which they were living. These efforts, however, were often not seen and not taken into account. A participant from Africa spoke of women who sold dried fruits outside a factory, seven days a week, to earn a little money. But they were seen to be a nuisance and made to move away. This lack of consideration was a characteristic of extreme poverty.

34. Along with the efforts made by the very poor, the solidarity demonstrated between the poor and the very poor and by the very poor amongst themselves was repeatedly mentioned. One participant from Africa gave examples of gestures of generosity he had witnessed in his neighbourhood, in particular when several people got together to help a woman bury her child in dignity and in accordance with tradition.

35. Many participants noted that extreme poverty exists everywhere in the world, in all regions and in developed as well as developing countries where it nevertheless had reached larger proportions. Depending on the region and the country, extreme poverty displays different aspects.

36. At the close of the debate on the dimensions of the problem of poverty, Mrs. Øyen made some concluding remarks. She referred to the testimony about the children who were denied access to the zoo, commenting that this was an impressive metaphor for the problem under scrutiny at the seminar. It underlined, in her opinion, the need to focus on the behaviour of the non-poor segments of society. She referred to the large discrepancies that she had noted throughout the discussion in the approaches to analysing and thereby beginning to combat poverty. The tolerance that the participants had displayed during the debate towards the different approaches was essential if the seminar was to bear fruit in terms of policy. Mrs. Øyen questioned whether persons living in situations of poverty do as a general rule show solidarity. In spite of the praiseworthy examples presented during the

discussion, she cautioned against too much optimism in this respect and referred to the many indications to the contrary in the vast literature on poverty research. Furthermore, she pointed at some of the almost insurmountable problems that must be faced squarely when seeking the participation of people living in poverty in the processes that aim to alleviate their condition, one of the problems being the representation of the impoverished. This representation is rendered difficult because once persons who had previously been poor became materially or politically successful, they had a well-known and documented tendency to loosen their former bonds of solidarity with those remaining in poverty.

37. Mrs. Øyen also referred to the statements citing the feelings of guilt that often inhibit people living in poverty from speaking up about their needs. Blaming the poor for being themselves responsible for their situation can be seen as a controlling strategy of the non-poor society and in this respect is similar to the often heard accusatory remarks about women being themselves responsible for being raped. In Mrs. Øyen's opinion, this controlling strategy again underlined the need to focus on non-poor behaviour to better understand the poor and develop effective policies to combat poverty.

38. On the issue of poverty and the family, Mrs. Øyen commented that research shows beyond a doubt that poverty also exists within the family, leading to situations where some members of the family are poor and others are not. She offered the examples of women who eat last at family meals, yet whose assets are used first to sustain the family. Research indicates that women tend to use resources for children more than men do. Mrs. Øyen stressed that when considering the importance and the role of the family in fighting poverty, these intra-family discrepancies should not be forgotten.

39. Finally, Mrs. Øyen urged that a small number of effective recommendations be adopted by the seminar for transmittal to the United Nations, its Member States and the World Summit on Social Development.

II. EXTREME POVERTY AND ITS EFFECTS FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF HUMAN RIGHTS

40. The issue of extreme poverty in relation to human rights was discussed at the 4th meeting, on 13 October 1994.

41. The item was introduced by Mr. Paul Hunt, Senior Lecturer of Law at Waikato University, Hamilton, New Zealand. Mr. Hunt stressed the great importance of scrutinizing, at the seminar, the issue of extreme poverty in the light of the international human rights law which has been so laboriously created by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights and its Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities - the very bodies that had mandated the seminar. Mr. Hunt referred to Mr. Despouy's preliminary report, in which he expressed his intention to "draw on the international instruments relating to human rights" (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1993/16, para. 51). Mr. Hunt expressed the view that, whereas a purely legal approach to poverty would never be an adequate response to the

problem, the international human rights law approach needs to be considered and is moreover consistent with other approaches as outlined by the Special Rapporteur in his reports.

42. The expert noticed a tendency in some quarters, no doubt well-intentioned, to look at human rights issues with relatively little reference to international human rights law. He found evidence of this, for example, in the debate surrounding the World Summit on Social Development to be held in Copenhagen in March 1995.

43. Mr. Hunt briefly reviewed some of the international human rights provisions and mechanisms of relevance to extreme poverty: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. No illusions should be harboured about this relatively new and complicated body of law and procedures that, in the eyes of the expert, had enormous inadequacies and remained in practical terms irrelevant for most people. That was why the focus of the seminar should be on the implementation of existing standards. Mr. Hunt cautioned against putting aside the implementation process of human rights because of the many difficulties that had to be faced, and turning to other issues which seemed less intractable.

44. By way of example, Mr. Hunt analysed three selected human rights areas to indicate how in practical terms the international human rights framework could be used to address situations of extreme poverty. These concerned the protection of the right to life, the prohibition of discrimination, and the work of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which monitors compliance with the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

45. With regard to the right to life as enshrined inter alia, in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the expert submitted that this right was not restricted to the prohibition of arbitrary killings and summary executions. He suggested that if a State had the means to reduce infant mortality or to prevent epidemics and failed to do so, it was in breach of the provisions that protect the right to life. If the State in question has ratified the Covenant and its Optional Protocol (providing for a complaints procedure to be used by individual persons), a complaint alleging the violation of the right to life by that State may be made to the Human Rights Committee, which monitors State compliance with the Covenant. This Committee expressed the view, when elaborating the content of the right to life, that "it would be desirable for States parties to take all possible measures to reduce infant mortality and to increase life expectancy, especially in adopting measures to eliminate malnutrition and epidemics" (HR1/GEN/1, General Comment 6, para. 5).

46. Mr. Hunt noted that this broader, social interpretation of the right to life has a lot of potential in the fight against extreme poverty. It enables the impoverished to submit complaints to treaty bodies of the United Nations human rights protection system, notably the Human Rights Committee.

47. Mr. Hunt went on to explain that extreme poverty often will be the result of discrimination. He referred to the observation of Mr. Asbjorn Eide, a member of the United Nations Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, in his study on human rights and income distribution, that discrimination often causes differences in income (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1994/21, para. 96). The principle of non-discrimination lies at the very heart of human rights protection. Existing human rights instruments, such as those cited, place an obligation on States parties to take positive, specific action to eliminate discrimination and to ensure that human rights are respected. This concerns the human rights of all persons, without distinction of any kind as to race, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. The Human Rights Committee put this obligation as follows: "In a State where the general conditions of a certain part of the population prevent or impair their enjoyment of human rights the State shall take specific action to correct those conditions". (HR1/GEN/1, General Comment 18, para. 10).

48. Mr. Hunt referred in this context to the testimony of one of the participants concerning children denied admittance to a zoo, apparently on the grounds of their social status. He saw no reason why this instance of discrimination and many similar ones should not be brought before a national court or before one of the United Nations human rights treaty bodies. He noted that it was vital to enable those persons living in extreme poverty to have recourse to justice, either individually or in groups and either through litigation in person or by third parties, notably non-governmental organizations. He suggested that an NGO should raise the matter with the committees that monitor compliance with the Covenants (to both of which the State in which the incident occurred is a party) at the time of the consideration of the report of that Government by the Committees.

49. Mr. Hunt stated that international human rights law requires States to engage in affirmative action and that this legal obligation could well be used in the struggle against extreme poverty. He also noted that the existing complaints procedures of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination need to be more widely ratified, strengthened and made more accessible. With respect to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, work had begun on a new procedure which would enable complaints to be submitted to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, an initiative that deserved the support of all the participants at the seminar.

50. As a third and last illustration of how to make human rights work for the struggle against extreme poverty, Mr. Hunt referred to the crucially important work of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Extreme poverty meant the denial of the social rights enshrined in the Covenant, including the rights to adequate food, clothing, housing, health care and education. At both the international and national levels human rights law marginalizes these social rights. Those who are committed to the eradication of poverty through the full implementation of human rights should assist in attempting to reverse this situation and to bring social rights from the margins into the mainstream of human rights. Non-governmental organizations in particular play a role that is vital to the success of the Committee's work. That role has been shown to be effective in a number of instances. For

example in 1991, the Government of a Latin American State, by means of a presidential decree, attempted to evict, if necessary by force, some 70,000 people; in all, some 19,000 families were to lose their homes. The matter came before the Committee which found the Government in violation of the Covenant. The Committee then issued what amounted to an injunction against the evictions and the Government desisted. In the campaign against oppression and poverty, the Covenant and its Committee clearly have considerable potential. But a great deal has to be done if that potential is to be realized. Most importantly, the Committee must identify the precise content of social rights and identify clearly the minimum standards to which all States are subject no matter what their level of development. Also, the Committee will have to identify the indicators by which it can measure States' performance in their compliance with the Covenant. Furthermore, an optional complaints procedure should be established. This proposal was supported by the World Conference on Human Rights. Lastly, Mr. Hunt noted that the Committee cannot do all this work alone. On many occasions, the Committee has publicly sought the participation and assistance of non-governmental organizations and United Nations specialized agencies but it has received, with a few noteworthy exceptions, very little help from any quarter. Given its relevance to the struggle against extreme poverty, the Committee deserves more active support from non-governmental organizations working to eradicate poverty. According to the expert, it would be negligent not to make as much use of it as possible.

51. A recurrent theme in the ensuing debate on extreme poverty and its effects as seen from the point of view of human rights was the interdependence and indivisibility of all human rights.

52. A participant from North America stressed the fact that all human rights were interdependent and indivisible in the way that all members of the human family were interdependent and indivisible, each individual depending on others to meet his basic needs. Also, the human person who is the subject of those rights is indivisible. Human rights exist to preserve human dignity, which is not a gift bestowed by an administration, but inherent in every person.

53. A number of participants testified about their daily lives, indicating that without shelter, drinking water, electricity, adequate food, work, a minimum income or other resources one simply could not conceive of living a life in good health, having one's children go to school, participating in the local cultural life, including annual festivities or even birthday parties, participating in any political processes as citizens, or even having one's family life respected. Several participants referred to this problem as a "vicious circle of misery" which limits the access of the deprived to social services, health care, education and participation in political decisions.

54. This was illustrated by a participant from Western Europe who said that in his experience all the aspects of life were interrelated and described how difficult it was to find a way out when one is caught in extreme poverty. The very poor, without education, find it difficult to get work. Without resources, it was impossible to get decent housing or pay bills. Families find themselves without electricity or even water. It is difficult to eat properly. Children find it difficult to learn. They are treated badly at

school, insulted and excluded from excursions because they cannot pay the costs. They are always at the bottom of the class. They are marked for life. The whole family is affected: there are misunderstandings, fights, break-ups. There are also repercussions for social life: families living in extreme poverty lose their freedom of movement; they hide, afraid to attend local celebrations and do not dare exercise their rights as citizens.

55. In another context, a participant from Asia also stressed the interdependence between the different aspects of life. He said that the lives of the very poor were marked by wandering: they go from one miserable situation to another, from slum to slum, beside garbage dumps, under bridges, in cemeteries or even the streets. Each time, the very poor find themselves destitute, having to begin again at zero. Living this way, it is extremely difficult to get health care or to educate children. Odd jobs or begging are necessary just to survive. Young girls are drawn into prostitution and children turn to drugs or become delinquents.

56. A participant from Western Europe described how his life in extreme poverty had had very serious consequences on the enjoyment of his right to found a family, as recognized in article 23.2 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Because of his state of poverty he had always been excluded from society. When he got married he had to hide the fact from the social service officers. When his child was born, it was taken away from them. He and his wife then met a volunteer of the International Movement ATD Fourth World who had helped them face the tribunal deciding whether their child should be put up for adoption. In the end, they did win the case. Parents who live in a state of extreme poverty should be given the necessary assistance so as to be able to raise their children.

57. The representative of UNICEF noted that the Convention on the Rights of the Child stipulated that rights were indivisible and that the well-being of the child is linked to that of its family. UNICEF is concerned with all the social and environmental factors which influence the milieu of the child and its family.

58. Mrs. de Vos van Steenwijk expressed her concern at the suggestions made by Mr. Hunt concerning the use of complaints procedures under international human rights treaties. Whereas this was interesting from a theoretical point of view, she could hardly imagine, for example, Latin American street children addressing the Human Rights Committee. She also expressed her doubts as to whether a non-governmental organization working with the poor would be allowed to continue that work if it would humiliate a Government by assisting its impoverished citizens to complain about human rights violations. She urged participants to be realistic in this respect.

59. In a reply, Mr. Hunt stated that thousands of persons and groups had already used existing United Nations complaints procedures in the field of human rights and that the number is steadily increasing. In his view, such procedures never humiliate Governments. United Nations human rights treaty bodies operate with extreme care. He recognized the importance of the cases of extreme poverty that had been presented and which had demonstrated how much the encroachment on human rights is linked to the perpetuation of poverty. He reiterated his conviction that taking up issues related to poverty as human

rights issues before the appropriate United Nations treaty bodies is a promising strategy to combat poverty effectively. He urged non-governmental organizations working with the poor to give it more thought.

III. STRUCTURAL APPROACHES: MAJOR POLICY ISSUES

60. The subject of structural approaches and major policy issues related to human rights and extreme poverty was discussed at the 4th and 5th meetings, on 13 and 14 October 1994.

61. The item was introduced by Mr. Willem van Genugten, member of the Advisory Committee on Human Rights and Foreign Policy of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, professor of human rights at the University of Nijmegen (the Netherlands) and associate professor of international law at Tilburg University (the Netherlands). Mr. van Genugten endorsed the many insights offered by Mr. Hunt on the way human rights, and especially economic, social and cultural rights, can be implemented to help eradicate extreme poverty. He expressed the hope that the current trend towards legally sharpening economic, social and cultural human rights, as started and encouraged by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, would continue. He strongly supported the establishment of an individual and/or collective complaints procedure with respect to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. However, it remained to be seen whether these hopeful developments in the fight against extreme poverty would yield positive results. He asked that attention be paid to structural issues involved in the implementation of human rights, notably in relation to the right to development.

62. The expert stressed that human rights are the expression of a specific social goal, that is, creating the legal, economic and social conditions in which persons all over the world can live a life worthy of a human being. Human rights protection is thus always linked to specific situations in specific countries and the international human rights instruments are supposed to evolve according to the changing needs that have to be met worldwide. Law, Mr. van Genugten stressed, is not a static phenomenon.

63. Mr. van Genugten noted that in many cases States need to build up political, social, economic and legal structures in order to ensure human rights and that this takes a lot of time, effort and money. In his opinion, large parts of the Western world have too often overlooked or tried to deny this. He recognized that it is, of course, easier to implement many civil and political rights under circumstances that we find in the developed world than under those in the developing world. Alternatively, civil and political rights can and should be protected whether a State is poor or not. He referred in this respect to the World Conference on Human Rights that resolved, in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, that "the lack of development may not be invoked to justify the abridgement of internationally recognized human rights" (Part I, para. 10).

64. In practice, the implementation of the standards set by the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights is not solely a legal matter, but is often blocked by the limited resources available to the relevant States and by other related barriers. Mr. van Genugten recalled the relevance of

article 2 and article 11 of the Covenant. These articles indicate a right to international assistance in case a State party is not able to independently realize the standards set out in the Covenant. Article 2 mentions "international assistance and cooperation" and article 11 stipulates that "[t]he States Parties to the present Covenant, recognizing the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger, shall take, individually and through international cooperation, the measures (...) which are needed", thereby "[t]aking into account the problems of both food-importing and food-exporting countries, to ensure an equitable distribution of world food supplies in relation to need". The expert pointed out that at this point the structural impediments to alleviating poverty that are faced by many States touch upon the legal obligation on the part of the international community as a whole to provide assistance to those States that are not able to handle structural poverty themselves. This obligation is, furthermore, apparent in the Charter of the United Nations where, in Articles 1, 55 and 56, all Members of the United Nations pledge themselves to take joint and separate action in cooperation with the Organization for the achievement of, for example, higher standards of living and solutions of international, economic, social, health and related problems. Of further relevance in this respect is the 1986 United Nations Declaration on the Right to Development. Even though this document is not - because of its status as a declaration - binding in a strictly legal sense, it is in many ways connected with the above-mentioned obligations of a more legally binding nature. The standards set out in these three legal documents are only the beginning of a codified, "hard", right to development.

65. In order for the right to assistance with regard to development to become more precise and thereby to give rise to more tangible legal obligations on the part of States, at least two questions will have to be answered: firstly, who is entitled to exercise the right to development? and secondly, what conditions will and can the rich part of the world demand in exchange for establishing a "hard" right to development? In these two questions international politics fuses with the legal work on the right to development.

66. On the first question, the expert noted that it is evident that, according to the Declaration on the Right to Development, States have an important role to play in the realization of the right to development. At the same time, it is even more evident that such tasks must be fulfilled for the benefit of people. As long as there is a risk that State organs will use the right to development principally for their own benefit and they cannot be held accountable to their own citizens for the way in which they put funds to use in their attempts to bring about development, the rich world will be reluctant to agree to any meaningful strengthening of the right to development.

67. With respect to the second question, the expert warned against attaching unrealistic conditions to development aid. He referred to the Council of Ministers of Development Cooperation of the European Union which in 1991 defined the concept of "good governance" to include a sensible economic and social policy, democratic decision-making, adequate governmental transparency and financial accountability, creation of a market-friendly environment for development, measures to combat corruption, as well as respect for the rule of law, human rights and freedom of the press and expression.

68. To overcome these difficulties, the United Nations Working Group on the Right to Development, the principal United Nations organ working on this issue, strenuously emphasizes the difference between States, peoples, individuals and non-governmental organizations. In addition, the Working Group stresses the importance of popular participation in the realization of the right to development. By so doing, the Group is seeking to clarify the notion of the right to development as a human right, in order to better define the structural issues that are impeding a more effective global struggle against extreme poverty. In the opinion of Mr. van Genugten, bringing this process to a satisfactory conclusion is one of the main human rights challenges for the near future.

69. In the ensuing debate on structural approaches and major policy issues as related to human rights and extreme poverty, participants introduced a number of issues in addition to those touched upon by Mr. van Genugten in his introduction.

70. Various participants, themselves living in extreme poverty, said that it seemed to them difficult to establish policies to combat extreme poverty without experiencing what it meant to be very poor. One participant from North America emphasized that administrations had difficulty understanding how the very poor lived. It was not sufficient merely to build houses for them. It would be more useful if administrations would take the time to understand what it meant to live in extreme poverty. As Mrs. Øyen said, it was also necessary to study the non-poor as they were the ones who defined poverty and by whose conduct the poor were denied access to development. In the fight against poverty it was necessary to educate the non-poor.

71. A participant from Asia recounted her experience in organizing cultural activities for youngsters living in an area of extremely poor people in a booming South-East Asian metropolis. Regular activities in the framework of a long-term project had enabled her and her fellow workers in the fight against poverty to establish a genuine relationship of confidence and to gain access to others who lived in a state of poverty so extreme that they virtually lived in hiding. She stressed the importance of undertaking long-term efforts in order to reach the extremely poor. Establishing trust must precede any attempt at facilitating the participation of the extremely poor in any activity, be it social, cultural, economic or political.

72. A participant from Latin America agreed. Two- or three-year projects were too short. It was sometimes necessary, to satisfy donor organizations, to demonstrate immediate results. The major risk of such an approach was that the most disadvantaged were sometimes pushed aside and breaches were created between those poor people who could and those who could not participate. He also agreed that the poor should not be seen as objects of study but as potential actors. Projects should not be developed by people in offices removed from the reality on the ground. The people concerned must participate at every stage of a project, from its conception to its evaluation. In his experience, this produced the best results.

73. A participant from Western Europe stated that the peoples' universities of the International Movement ATD Fourth World assisted the extremely poor in acquiring the skills and means to participate in social life. People living

in extreme poverty could get together with teachers, social workers and others to discuss their situations, to learn to express their concerns and to learn about their rights and how to defend them. The participant stressed the laborious nature of such work and the enormous amounts of time needed for it. He said that he would have been unable to participate in the seminar had he not been active in peoples' universities for many years.

74. A participant from Western Europe also centred on the discrepancy he had observed between the reality of the very poor and the institutions supposedly acting on their behalf. Only genuine participation by the very poor could change the way in which the notion of poverty was apprehended.

75. The representative of UNICEF recognized the great importance of the respect for human dignity in finding practical solutions to problems of poverty. She explained that for her organization it is not always easy to live up to that respect, for example in situations of food rationing where circumstances sometimes press the Fund into separating families to ensure the equitable distribution of food. She wondered however, as to how to attain solutions to such problems and welcomed any suggestions in this respect, be it during the seminar or thereafter.

76. A number of participants referred to the importance of education and access to culture as essential prerequisites for the poor to engage in activities that would enable them to tackle their social exclusion and political marginalization. Some participants referred to practical steps undertaken in their countries, such as cultural activities in penal institutions and school projects involving children living in situations of extreme poverty.

77. Mrs. Øyen stated that a number of issues that had been discussed under the agenda item, both concerning legal responsibilities of Governments to protect human rights and concerning the steps needed to facilitate participation of the poor, converged in the notion of social citizenship. At the core of this notion lies the principle that the benefits to which the poor are entitled under existing social legislation should be extended to the poorest groups of society. She drew the attention of the participants to the extensive literature on the subject.

78. Mr. van Genugten commented briefly on the debate, noting the importance of the practical experiences offered by the many participants and that all had a human rights aspect. There are, of course, situations of poverty that cannot be solved by using the individual human rights complaints procedures at the United Nations. Such situations require structural approaches. At the level of the United Nations, these include notably the strengthening of the right to development, so as to balance the legitimate claims for the respect of human dignity and human rights with the legitimate claim for development.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Conclusions

79. The seminar profited greatly from the wide variety of contributions of all its participants, who had very different backgrounds and experiences and came from all continents of the world. It was the first meeting organized by the United Nations Centre for Human Rights that involved the participation not only of many experts, academics and representatives of States, United Nations bodies and non-governmental organizations, but also of persons who live or have lived the experience of extreme poverty. Notwithstanding the many different approaches and views expressed at the seminar, the participants agreed that its unique character served to render their reflections on the complicated issue of human rights and extreme poverty at the same time more realistic and more profound.

80. There exists no single definition of poverty, or extreme poverty, that captures all aspects of the phenomenon. Many approaches towards the understanding of extreme poverty, which share a number of important features, were discussed at the seminar.

81. Participants found the phenomenon of extreme poverty to be universal. It affects all regions of the world, yet it has characteristics that differ with each region. In developing countries, extreme poverty has a more dramatic impact than in the developed world. Furthermore, extreme poverty is affecting the lives of a growing number of people and is growing even in proportion to the world population as a whole.

82. Extreme poverty constitutes an affront to human dignity in its perpetuation of the exclusion of impoverished people from dominant society and in its concomitant neglect of the protection of human rights of affected persons, families and groups.

83. It is clear that situations of extreme poverty affect all human rights: civil, cultural, economic, political and social, as well as the right to development, of which the human person is the central subject. The seminar underlined the interdependence and indivisibility of all human rights as well as the urgent need to take concrete steps to address the manifold situations of extreme poverty through the process of a more effective implementation of international human rights instruments.

84. The seminar underscored the need for the ongoing participation of persons living in extreme poverty in the elaboration of knowledge and policies concerning the eradication of extreme poverty. Only those experiencing situations of extreme poverty know what these situations entail in everyday life. Such participation, however, meets with many difficulties. Among these are the attitudes of the non-poor segments of society towards the poor; the complex nature of the problem itself, which tends to elude many crude attempts at defining and combating it; and the circumstances of lives of the impoverished in which the question of mere day-to-day survival outranks all other problems in urgency and importance. The seminar found that the role of non-governmental organizations is vital in bringing about such participation.

85. The seminar recognized that persons, families and groups living in situations of extreme poverty make constant and important efforts in fighting to improve their living conditions. Such efforts tend to go unnoticed by the dominant society, which seems unable to build upon them or upon the fragile solidarity that can exist among persons, families and groups living in situations of extreme poverty.

86. The participants suggested that, despite all their efforts, it was often impossible for people living in extreme poverty, owing to a lack of means and the possibility to exercise their human rights effectively, to assume the responsibilities to which they aspired. Their dignity suffered because they were considered useless, and felt themselves to be removed from the decisions that concerned them, even those decisions having a profound effect on their private lives.

B. Recommendations

87. In the light of the many statements and the debate during the seminar, the participants recommended the following to the United Nations, its Member States, and non-governmental organizations working in the field of human rights and extreme poverty.

1. All policies that aim at the eradication of poverty should:

(a) Reach to the level of extreme poverty;

(b) Take account of human rights and the indivisibility and interdependent character thereof;

(c) Creatively seek to strengthen the access of the poor to judicial and political mechanisms to implement human rights;

(d) Take into consideration and build upon the social and psychological strengths of persons, families and groups living in extreme poverty, including their manifestations of solidarity;

(e) Actively seek the participation of the impoverished;

(f) Include the element of human rights education to both the non-poor and the poor.

2. The issue of human rights and extreme poverty should be a constant preoccupation of the United Nations.

3. The elaboration, implementation and evaluation of United Nations programmes to eradicate poverty and extreme poverty should include as a basic and continuous element the protection and promotion of all human rights and should constantly bear in mind the indivisibility and interdependence of human rights.

4. The World Summit for Social Development should extensively discuss in what way human rights instruments can be used in order to eradicate extreme poverty, either in individual cases or in poverty situations of a more general character. Many of the following recommendations can be used for that aim.

5. The promotion, application and respect for economic, social and cultural rights should have the same importance and receive the same attention as civil and political rights in the relevant United Nations organs and the action of non-governmental organizations.

6. The Human Rights Committee should be encouraged to continue its approach to interpret civil and political rights in a social way and to explore their meaning for the alleviation of poverty in individual cases. Such interpretations also contribute to underlining the indivisibility of civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights.

7. Given that economic, social and cultural rights can be used more effectively to alleviate extreme poverty, steps should be taken to strengthen the International Covenant on Economic and Social Rights and the work of its Committee. These steps include, inter alia:

(a) The elaboration of the precise content of economic, social, and cultural rights;

(b) The clarification of the minimum "core" rights enshrined in the Covenant;

(c) The provision for an individual and/or collective complaints procedure as envisaged by the proposal the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights presented to the World Conference on Human Rights in 1993;

(d) The more active participation of non-governmental organizations and United Nations specialized agencies in the work of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights so as to render it more effective.

8. The Working Group on the Right to Development should be encouraged to pursue ways to render more tangible and precise the obligation on the part of the international community as a whole to provide assistance to individual States in cases where the latter are manifestly unable to independently realize standards in the field of economic, social and cultural rights. These standards include, inter alia, the right to housing, health, food, work, social security, education and an adequate standard of living.

9. Individual persons and groups living in extreme poverty should be in a position to invoke existing human rights provisions to seek improvements in their situation. This is of vital importance for the effective use of international human rights law in the fight against extreme poverty. It implies, inter alia, that persons living in extreme poverty and people and organizations working alongside them in their

struggle against extreme poverty are enabled to gain and disseminate knowledge of the relevant human rights instruments. Governments should be encouraged to take steps to this end, either independently or with the assistance of the advisory services provided by the United Nations Centre for Human Rights.

10. Persons and groups living in extreme poverty should have access to education and to their own culture so as to be able to seek to improve their situation. This implies, inter alia, that States take measures to make primary education compulsory, available and free to all, and to eliminate illiteracy and ignorance. This can be accomplished by means of international cooperation which takes into account in particular the needs of developing countries.

11. Given that women are disproportionately represented among those living in extreme poverty, all possible steps should be taken to promote and protect the human rights of women. In this regard, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women should be strengthened with the introduction of a complaints procedure.

12. Given that children are disproportionately represented among those living in extreme poverty, all possible steps should be taken to enable all children, whether born in or out of wedlock, to enjoy the same social protection. The family, as the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members, particularly children, should be afforded the necessary protection and assistance so that it can fully assume its responsibilities within the community. States should take all possible measures to assist and protect children who are temporarily or permanently deprived of their family environment or who cannot be allowed to remain in that environment for their own best interest.

13. The participants at the seminar, aware of the importance of the work undertaken on the subject of human rights and extreme poverty by the United Nations Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, strongly encourage the Sub-Commission to continue its work with unabated vigour.

14. More research, production and exchange of knowledge are needed about the processes which create and sustain poverty. Such knowledge should facilitate the creation of policies that are more effective in the struggle against poverty, inter alia, by promoting the participation of persons and families living in extreme poverty and by considering the human rights of the poor in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of such policies.

Annex I

STATEMENTS DELIVERED AT THE OPENING SESSION

A. Message from the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, Mr. Ibrahima Fall

Since the pioneering decision by the Commission on Human Rights in 1989 to consider extreme poverty within the context of human rights and fundamental freedoms, the United Nations has worked continually to raise world awareness and that of all the actors in the international community concerning the urgent need to give thought to the elimination of extreme poverty and develop a strategy of action for doing so.

First, the General Assembly, which accords high priority to this issue, decided to consider it in the context of the Fourth United Nations Development Decade, one of whose main objectives is precisely a significant reduction of extreme poverty. Next, the General Assembly, in resolution 47/196, decided to proclaim 17 October of every year the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, thus formally recognizing the link between extreme poverty and the various activities conducted by the United Nations with a view to achieving the objectives of the Charter of the United Nations.

For its part, the World Conference on Human Rights, held at Vienna in June 1993, considered extreme poverty and social exclusion to be a violation of human dignity. It affirmed the need for the international community to take urgent steps to achieve better knowledge of extreme poverty and its causes, including those related to the problem of development, in order to promote the human rights of the poorest and to immediately alleviate and eventually eliminate extreme poverty and social exclusion. The World Conference confirmed the initiatives already taken by organizations and individuals working for the dignity and legitimate rights of the poorest, and stated that it was essential for States to foster participation by the poorest people in the decision-making process by the community in which they live, the promotion of human rights and efforts to combat extreme poverty.

Even in conjunction with previous United Nations activities, the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action have not been sufficient to eliminate, or even immediately alleviate, extreme poverty and social exclusion.

It is for this reason that the Secretary-General, Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, is orienting United Nations action, in particular at the level of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Centre for Human Rights, towards a global and operational approach.

Your meeting is all the more important in being attended by people who are living in extreme poverty every day, who have come from the four corners of the Earth to help us develop our thoughts on the need for respect of human dignity as an indicator of the achievement of human rights.

I am convinced that your work at this meeting will also help further to raise the awareness of the international community so that it will redouble

its efforts to reduce the growing gap between rich and poor, within countries and between countries, in order to guarantee present and future generations a life of dignity, justice and peace.

I wish you every success in your work.

B. Statement by the Chairman, Mr. José Bengoa, following his election

In an exponentially growing world, where the mass media make possible increasingly rapid intercommunication and where higher and higher educational and cultural levels are required in order to survive and highly sophisticated products are available, we still find poverty, poor people, the great marginalized masses. This is the major contradiction of our time. It is the great social and political problem of the modern world.

Who are the poor?

The usual definitions of poverty would appear to be inadequate. Poverty is a complex situation of persons, families and social groups, dependent on many factors. Negative factors, non-fulfilment of basic needs, and positive factors, potential that the poor can and should be realizing for the benefit of society as a whole.

Poverty is a relationship. Basic needs are always determined by cultures, by the type of society in which each individual has been called upon to live. Poverty is a concept that is relative to specific societies, and it is therefore a standard that changes with time. A few decades ago, the fact of not having a radio or television set did not mean that one was poor; today, in many parts of the world, it does. The same applies even to food and other areas of life.

Poverty speaks out to societies, countries and the international community. Extreme poverty in particular implies a criticism of non-poverty. It prevents societies from functioning without conflicts, cloaks the stability of institutions in doubt and fear and is a moral accusation of all the inhabitants of a country, a region or the world.

CONCEPT OF POVERTY

1. A low income, or the lack of a stable income, is probably the most obvious material expression of poverty. Measurements of poverty generally focus on this indicator.

The statistical measurement generally adopted by the United Nations specialized agencies to determine who is poor, is, people or households not enjoying an income equivalent to two basic food baskets per month. Less than one food basket means that the person or household is considered to be indigent, which is a step lower than extreme poverty.

This indicator is obviously useful for developing and evaluating State policies. However, a yardstick should not be confused with the actual definition of the problem.

Poverty is reflected in the lack of goods and, especially, difficulty of access to the goods and services that society theoretically makes available to its members. These deficiencies, to use technical language, are multi-faceted. When harshly combined, they entail a situation of extreme poverty.

2. Housing is probably the most significant material expression of the lack of goods. It is no accident that the world of the poor is generally associated with people living in spontaneous dwellings, with no drinking water, sewage system or electricity, in accommodation made from cast-off or other flimsy materials.

The relationship between poverty and housing is of crucial importance in the cities; it is less so in the countryside, where people from traditional cultures live in dwellings that are adapted to the climatic conditions of the area, while totally unrelated to the parameters of urban "conveniences". In the cities, housing-related problems take on more complex dimensions.

3. Disease and difficulty in gaining access to health systems are another significant indication of poverty. Deficient food and housing conditions are reflected physically in the lives of the poor.

4. Access to education and culture is probably the most complex dimension of poverty. The combination of economic deficiencies (income), material deficiencies (housing) and psychophysical difficulties (health) generally leads to a lack of education, to exclusion from the school system and to the undermining of the importance of education and culture.

The marginalization of the poor with respect to the systems and codes of a society's culture is probably the main factor in reproducing a poverty situation. Not knowing a trade, not knowing how to gain access to technologies, not having the basic tools used by the society at large, is a deficiency from one point of view, but from another, it implies enormous difficulty in overcoming the condition of poverty itself.

5. Exclusion from the labour market and economic activity, lack of income and poor nutrition, together with run-down or very poor housing, lack of access to health care and serious physical and psychological problems in individuals' lives, and lack of access to formal education and culture, are some of the main aspects that make an extreme poverty situation.

The term "hard-core poverty" is used to describe the situation of families that have lived in such conditions for several generations, unable to transmit work skills down through the generations, with no specific job training, no integration whatsoever into society, no experience of the relationship between effort made and results obtained. In such circumstances, poverty takes root and becomes an ongoing situation that constantly repeats itself over time.

In such cases, which are unfortunately very widespread, the poor become a stable feature of society. They develop their own forms of self-sufficiency and survival, their own ways of relating, culminating in what has been called a subculture of poverty.

Society at large is becoming stratified in such a way that these "marginalized or marginal" sectors are observed at arm's length and often dismissed out of fear, which causes a split in community life. Considering poverty as an "unavoidable evil", culturally speaking, is the greatest misfortune that can happen to society in general and to the modern world.

THE DIGNITY OF THE POOR

6. The world of the poor is not only one of deficiencies. The world of the poor contains enormous potential, unimagined even by the poor themselves, denied and even rejected by society at large. Survival in the midst of harsh poverty conditions is made possible by the development of a set of values and actions, a significant aspect of which is solidarity.

The self-help experiences with which human history is replete provide a basis for an overall understanding of the world of the poor.

A concept of poverty that does not take account of the positive aspects of the poor and their contribution to society would be an affront to their dignity.

Lack of possessions and lack of income do not mean the lack of a concept of life or of culture, decency and morality, and often even strengthens them.

The many experiences of solidarity among the poor have shown their capacity for participation, self-organization and working together.

The faith of the poor, their religious aspect, the spiritual life that poverty opens up, the maintenance of traditions and age-old customs, knowledge often forgotten by others, are contributions that the poor can offer society and humanity in general.

The capacity to overcome poverty can be found in the world of the poor. If deficiencies were absolute, the poor would unavoidably sink into the maelstrom of destruction. The capacity to break out from poverty can be found within the poor themselves.

7. The world of the poor is a varied one. Poverty takes many forms.

(a) Poverty caused by backwardness. The traditional world of the poor has been the result of particular conditions of economic production and social and cultural situations over the years. Very often in the third world today, small peasant producers who know their work and are experts on their natural environment have, through no fault of their own, seen the prices of their products decline and their lands diminish in both quantity and quality.

This wisdom and dignity of the long-standing poor should be taken into account in defining poverty and social policies.

Indigenous peoples represent a world of the poor as regards access to modern material goods, but they are the possessors and depositories of enormous cultural wealth. To fail to note this second aspect would be to adopt a discriminatory approach.

There are sectors of the poor whose poverty is caused by external factors seriously undermining their dignity as individuals, as a social group and as a culture.

(b) Poverty caused by modernity. Some types of poverty are not due to backwardness but are a result of development and economic changes throughout the world and in each country. This is modern poverty, produced by development itself when it is unbalanced.

There are sectors whose poverty is due not so much to lack of work as to poor job quality, low wages, lack of social security, non-compliance with minimum labour laws and factors of that nature.

This type of poverty, which is a product of modernization and imbalances, particularly affects certain sectors whose age makes them more vulnerable: children and young people. Children from broken homes roam the streets, entering the spiral of poverty. Young people, seeing no possibilities of any change in their situation, often enter the world of drugs and become even more marginal.

(c) The third type of poverty is a product of specific situations, often not resulting directly from economic and social factors.

This is the case for disabilities. Disabled people have physical deficiencies which accentuate the problems of the social environment in which the disabled have to live.

This is the case for senior citizens, whose poverty increases by reason of their age.

It is also the case for female heads of household, where the husband, male partner or head of household has abandoned the home or family, and poverty conditions are thereby worsened.

OVERCOMING POVERTY

8. Poverty can be overcome when a social group, a set of individuals or families, surely and successfully initiates a process of internal change that enables it to enter the world of the goods and services provided by society, improve its quality of life and envisage a better future for its children.

Considered from this humanistic and compassionate point of view, the poverty threshold is located in the area of culture, in the area of hope and the ability to initiate processes of accumulation, both economic and educational, cultural and spiritual.

This is why poverty cannot be overcome through the welfare system. By definition, grants and gifts do not cause a new process to be initiated. They may help one family or person individually to cross over the poverty line, but they do not give people the strength to be self-sufficient in the long run.

Most poor people have hopes of resolving their problems; all they ask of society is appropriate facilities for doing so.

An understanding of the dignity of the poor is part and parcel of a concept of poverty which, if poverty is to be overcome, must not be welfare-oriented or paternalistic.

Society, by denying the poor room for their development, by not enabling them to initiate an accumulation process by themselves, is impairing the dignity of the poor.

9. Together with the internal factors mentioned above, overcoming poverty requires that appropriate opportunities should be opened up by societies and States. It is obvious that the poor, and poor countries in many cases, are subjected to external causes beyond their control. Unless we loosen the fetters of the poor, poverty cannot be overcome.

10. Overcoming poverty is dependent on macroeconomic conditions. Without consistency between macroeconomic measures, social policies and action by private groups in a society, there can be no overcoming of poverty. A macroeconomic decision can often ruin years of effort to overcome poverty in a sector of the population.

11. Overcoming poverty is also inextricably linked to the existence of a culture of solidarity at the international and national levels.

The increasing intercommunication, globalization and, often, unity of action and agreement that is gaining the contemporary world will make it imperative to establish rules for putting a concept and culture of solidarity into effect. Just as there are increasing numbers of rules concerning finance, trade and certain individual rights, the issue of fairness will have to be resolved in the near future. There should be an international discussion on the topic of distribution of income, at both the international and national levels, as an economic factor to be considered in any type of decision-making. Distribution of income has a direct connection to poverty.

International policies in various sectors of economic activity are binding on States, yet there are no similar commonly-accepted policies for the redistribution of income. We know perfectly well that the developed countries' success is due to their capacity not only to create wealth but also to distribute it among their population. A stable world economy will probably be attained when there are also redistribution policies to increase markets and make possible a better life for the great majority of the world's people.

Extreme poverty raises an enormous challenge for the international community. We must establish a culture of solidarity to provide an appropriate atmosphere for devising effective redistribution polices that will introduce greater fairness at the international and national levels and provide new and better opportunities for the great majority of the people of this world, the poor.

C. Statement by Mrs. Alwine de Vos van Steenwijk, President of the International Movement ATD Fourth World

The President of the International Movement ATD Fourth World spoke at the opening meeting, describing the background to the holding of the seminar. She recalled that the title of the seminar echoed the words of Father Joseph Wresinski, founder of the International Movement ATD Fourth World, himself born into extreme poverty: "Extreme poverty deprives a portion of the population of all countries, rich and poor, of all their rights, and, therefore, of all means of taking on responsibilities in the community in which they live." "Because of this same experience of exclusion", he added, "these millions of families form one people over all continents (...). This people will never emerge from poverty until such time as it is welcomed in its entirety as a people where other men discuss and decide about (...) the future of humanity (...) I will help these families to clime the steps (...) of the United Nations". That promise had now been kept, for a delegation of families from areas of extreme poverty was being welcomed into the new United Nations as partners who would undoubtedly make a positive contribution.

Mrs. de Vos then stated that the seminar represented an innovation on several levels. It was the first United Nations seminar to confirm that extreme poverty was a "lack" of all human rights. For the first time a seminar had emerged from a direct appeal by those trapped in the vicious circle of poverty and was being organized with their participation. The seminar represented an attempt at partnership with the very poorest. As the Wresinski report to the French Economic and Social Council, "Extreme poverty and economic and social precariousness", had stated, it was unacceptable in a democracy for studies to be made and symposia held on groups in extreme poverty if those groups did not have the means to monitor, correct or contest them. All individuals and populations had the right to some control over the information being distributed about them, which led to the introduction of, or failure to introduce, policies. The seminar represented an effort at knowledge that was at the same time an act of restoration of the right to a partnership. Families living in areas of destitution also wished to point out that they had been deprived of their history for centuries, inasmuch as their life experience only became history if it was recounted, disseminated and taken into account by others.

She then emphasized the fact that, although new partners were present on the international scene, that was not a magical solution. It was difficult to reach the very poor, with whom the rest of the world no longer had a common language. We no longer knew which paths led deep into the zones of poverty. Father Joseph Wresinski had been wont to say, "The time of man has come again", stating the prerequisite for ushering in a sound and substantial partnership: "We can no longer refrain from investing the best of ourselves in the most poverty-stricken areas; we must be men and women who do not abandon a group after a year or two (...) but who give of themselves over a period of many years". It had only been possible to bring representatives of very poor families to the seminar through a person-to-person investment by humble citizens and NGOs large and small. Families living in extreme poverty were the first and last agents of human rights. The first, where no one had yet come, and the last, when others had come but had given up.

Annex II

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Chairman: Mr. José Bengoa
Rapporteur: Mr. Bruno Romazzotti

Participants

Mrs. Estefansa Aldaba-Lim
Mrs. Josephine Alumanah
Mr. Jean-Baptiste Ogvie Anoman
Mr. Paul Bouchet
Mr. Van Bourgogne
Mr. Eugen Brand
Mr. Michel Buffard
Mr. Claudio Calvaruso
Mrs. Marie-Francoise Clement-Fanelli
Mrs. Leonore Cola
Mr. Charles Courtney
Mr. Jean Diene
Mrs. Lydia Dorofeeva
Mrs. Martine Deseille
Mr. Regis de Muylder
Mrs. Alwine de Vos van Steenwijk
Mr. David Ebsworth
Ms. Gabrielle Erpicum
Mr. Javier Espindola
Mr. J.J. Espindola
Mr. Vincent Fanelli
Mr. Felicien Feliho
Mr. Willem van Genugten
Mr. Paul Hunt
Mrs. Colette Jay
Mr. Sergueiv Levine
Mrs. Patricia McConolague
Mrs. Sherrie McGee
Mr. Georges Mejean
Mr. Rosito Nino
Ms. Sarah Ortega
Mrs. Else Øyen
Mrs. Rosa Perez-Borja
Mr. Ton Redegeld
Mrs. Donna Start
Ms. Ratna Tapong
Mr. Marco Aurelio Ugarte
Mrs. Mary Ugwu
Mrs. Margaret Varma
Mr. Stuart Williams
Mr. Gaban Yuca Tundui

Governments represented by observers

Bangladesh, Côte d'Ivoire, France, Germany, Japan, Morocco, Nigeria, South Africa, United States of America, Zimbabwe.

United Nations bodies

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Population Division of the Department for Economic and Social Information and Policy Analysis.

Specialized agencies

International Labour Organisation, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.